

# SUMMER READING CHALLENGE

## 2017/18 Review – Executive Summary

### About the Summer Reading Challenge

The annual Summer Reading Challenge is the nation's biggest reading for pleasure programme. It was launched in 1999 to encourage children aged 4 to 11 to borrow and read six library books during the long school holidays. There is a different theme each year and children can read whatever they like. They receive incentives for each book they finish, and those who read at least six get a certificate or medal. The vast majority of UK library authorities (currently 96%) offer the Challenge, and around 700,000 children take part every year - 45% of them boys. In recent years pre-school children have joined in - and increasing numbers of teenagers and young adults have volunteered to help.



[summerreadingchallenge.org.uk](http://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk)

[readingagency.org.uk](http://readingagency.org.uk)

Registered charity number: 1085443

“It’s on in almost every locality, it’s a delight for the children to take part in and guess what, it’s one of the few things where you’re delighted and it does you good! What could be better? If you’re in a position to support the Summer Reading Challenge, you know there is nothing better if you care about children and young people and our society and the way it can operate and move forward.”

**Michael Rosen**

Author and Professor of Children’s Literature,  
Goldsmiths University, and past UK  
Children’s Laureate



THE  
READING  
AGENCY



# About The Reading Agency

The Reading Agency is a UK-wide charity funded by Arts Council England that tackles life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. Its vision is for a world where everyone is reading their way to a better life. The Reading Agency works closely with its many partners to deliver tailored programmes to more than a million people every year, of all ages and backgrounds. The Summer Reading Challenge is delivered in partnership with Libraries Connected and the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians.

## About the Summer Reading Challenge Review

The Summer Reading Challenge is reviewed every four years to check it is still working well, to respond to changing operational needs, and to identify potential improvements and growth. The review was ambitious in its scope and generated more than 1,000 responses which have shaped the recommendations summarised here. Public libraries have faced significant challenges in recent years and many services have had to adjust their activity programmes to reflect pressures on budgets and workforces - so the 2017/18 review was timely.

The overarching aim of the review was to identify what is needed to future-proof the Summer Reading Challenge as a core UK library offer encouraging more children to read for pleasure and join the library, especially in the long summer break from school when children's reading skill and confidence can dip.



## About this Executive Summary

This document summarises the key findings of the review and the resulting action plan under four main headings:

- Management and delivery
- Partnerships and audiences
- Future planning and business models
- Communications and marketing

The full Summer Reading Challenge Review report and supporting resources can be viewed at: [www.readingagency.org.uk/screview](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/screview)



# Key questions for the review were how to:



The consultation reached:



## Methodology

The Summer Reading Challenge Review Group (SRCRG) reviewed relevant local and national policies and consulted with libraries, parents and carers, existing and potential partners, and teachers. The review was completed in-house by The Reading Agency with support from Libraries Connected, the Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians (ASCEL), the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), and the Welsh Books Council. Additional support to gather evidence from the education sector was provided by the University of Cambridge ThinkLab scheme and the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA).



The review findings were used to inform and shape a new four year plan for 2019 - 2022

# Key findings and development areas

## Headlines

The research has evidenced both the impact of the Challenge and the strong sector support it has as a national programme, locally delivered and tailored to meet local needs.

All those interviewed discussed their belief in the programme, the impact of participation on children's enjoyment of reading and reading skills, and a strong commitment to maintaining its reach and impact in challenging financial times. They are ambitious for the Challenge - they want it to remain creative and sustainable for future generations, and for this to happen we need to be open to new ways of working.

**The key findings are summarised under the headings below, with the identified priority development areas for 2019-2022:**

## Management and delivery

The Summer Reading Challenge is hugely popular with libraries, their partners and customers - all of whom have testified to the quality, reach and impact of the programme. The research has shown a desire to streamline resources and to make the Challenge easier to manage and deliver. The goal is to free up capacity nationally and locally, to forge new partnerships, embed the co-creation model, work with new audiences, and develop new strands to the programme to engage more families.

There is a commitment to maintain and develop the young people's volunteering offer because of the benefits the scheme offers to all involved. Young people are offered high-quality local work experience and skills development - and the evidence shows that they, in their turn, inspire and motivate younger children to read more.

### Priority areas for 2019-2022

- Develop a robust co-creation model so that we are working with children and families to develop and deliver the 2020 challenge
- Explore what would be needed, in terms of resources and experiences, to ensure that children who have been involved in the Challenge from ages four and five will continue to take part throughout primary school



## Partnerships and audience

The Summer Reading Challenge has become a mainstay of most library event calendars. Parents and carers appreciate a fun activity to occupy their children during the long school break that is educational, productive and free. There is clearly potential for expansion and growth and the goal, over the course of the next four years, is to work more closely with schools and parents/carers, particularly in areas of deprivation, to encourage more children to take part.

This means prioritising researching barriers to participation and strategies for overcoming them. The review has also identified opportunities to pursue new partnerships - within the health, family learning and cultural sectors to help us achieve our goals. The consultation testified to the important role authors and illustrators play in helping to inspire children's creative reading, and we want to develop this further in the future.

### Priority areas for 2019-2022

- Create a school development plan and a family engagement strategy to help us broaden the reach of the Challenge and identify ways of building relationships between schools, library services, Arts Council England Cultural Education Partnerships (CEPs) and Bridge organisations
- Work with our publishing partners, authors and illustrators to actively support children's creativity and champion the Challenge

## Planning for the future and business models

The review reinforced the need to future-proof the Challenge to guarantee its sustainability. There is a clear imperative to investigate potential commercial sponsorship and new business models to generate income.

One of the main reasons for the Challenge's popularity is that it encourages children to visit physical libraries to take part and borrow books. It makes reading a social activity - building community engagement and encouraging library visits as a year-round habit. Parents and carers talked about the physical space and tangible resources of libraries as one of the strengths of the Challenge, given concerns about excessive screen time. However, children growing up in an increasingly digital world do expect to be able to engage with reading activities and share their experiences in different ways. The extent to which digital technology needs to be more consistent and embedded as part of the Challenge therefore needs exploring. In addition, there are concerns that the cost of printing and distributing resources - on which the current business model is based - could become prohibitive.

### Priority areas for 2019-2022

- Securing a sponsor for the Summer Reading Challenge who will help us to extend its reach and develop new elements
- Diversifying the business model and exploring new ways of generating the income it needs e.g. licensing, advertising on the website, and putting a commercial value on reading trends data we can collect
- Researching new digital delivery models and engagement tools

## Communications and marketing

With around 700,000 children taking part each year, the review has highlighted the value of the programme and the potential to increase participation. Until now the main focus has been on delivery to libraries, rather than promotion. The consultation emphasised the need to both promote and market the Challenge more effectively to families and schools, and to communicate its reach and evidence-based impact more effectively to decision-makers and funders, nationally and locally.

### Priority areas for 2019-2022

- Use the 20th anniversary of the Challenge as a means of raising its profile and promoting it to new audiences
- Create advocacy resources demonstrating the reach, scale and impact of the Summer Reading Challenge nationally and locally
- Commission external evaluation of the 2019 Challenge with funding provided by Arts Council England



**“I welcome this timely review. The Summer Reading Challenge is one of my favourite things - so full of fun and the joy of reading for pleasure. This is what libraries are all about and we need the Summer Reading Challenge more than ever.”**

**Chris Riddell OBE**

Author, illustrator, cartoonist, and past UK Children's Laureate

# Conclusions

The review has shown enormous sector commitment to the shared Summer Reading Challenge programme, with stakeholders and partners ambitious to build on its strength and extend its reach and impact. We want it to remain creative and sustainable for future generations and the review, as summarised here, outlines an ambitious development plan to help us achieve this goal.

The full report and supporting resources can be seen at: [www.readingagency.org.uk/srcreview](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/srcreview)

## How the Summer Reading Challenge helps meet local and national agendas:

